
America's Global Leadership Challenge in the 21st Century

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Leadership is vital to any successful human endeavor to businesses that must compete in an increasingly tough global marketplace, to non-government organizations and universities. Leadership is also an irreplaceable commodity for a nation, especially one as great and powerful as the United States of America. Today, the global leadership challenge that we Americans have inherited and that will be such a vital factor in the success or failure of our foreign policy in the years ahead.

We face a very different leadership challenge, in my view, than that of all the generations of Americans before us. For all of our history until the mid-twentieth century, our leaders focused primarily on the job of building and sustaining a new country here at home. Starting now, and in the future, I believe we will need American leadership most in the external work of building a strong world beyond our shores. In Virginia, where my family and I now live, we are about to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown in 1607. Think of our history since then? Over four centuries, we have succeeded in:

- Building an exceptional nation
- Expanded westward three thousand miles across a vast continent
- We have fashioned an extraordinary melting pot of races and religions
- We have overcome a bloody and deeply divisive civil war
- We have built the most powerful economy and military the world has ever seen

Ours is an astounding story of growth and success. We succeeded in large part, due to our leaders who emerged at pivotal moments in our history to provide vision and greatness. We produced some of the most luminous leaders of modern history here in America. Jefferson whose universal ideal of freedom and liberty was revolutionary in the 18th century and remains so even today. Lincoln who held us together heroically, single-handedly, and without whom the north may not have succeeded in vanquishing slavery in the 19th century. While it is true that America has been a leading force on the international stage for the last half century, our greatest energies have been spent on building America from the inside out here at home.

Now, during these four centuries, we have also had the extraordinary good geographical fortune of living with practically no external threats. Think of that - a situation nearly unique of all great powers in all of human history. For most of this time, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans have been our great twin protectors sealing off the world's worst excesses from our shores. This gave us the luxury of retreating, when we were inclined to follow John Quincy Adams, famous admonition that Americans should not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.

This singular fact of our physical separation from the rest of the world permitted us to vacillate between isolation from the world and bursts of intense, but all too often, brief engagement in it as during the world wars and cold war of the twentieth century. This American ambivalence about the rest of the world is, as I learned so well here at Boston College, the defining feature of our foreign

policy since our founding. We are a people that until now has swung wildly back and forth between seeking to lead and shrinking from leadership itself.

Consider just a few famous examples from our history. Jefferson warned in his first inaugural address of the danger of entangling alliances. Woodrow Wilson put two million of our soldiers into the great war which essentially ensured victory for Britain and France at its climactic moment. But, only two years later, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts defeated Wilson's vision of a great universal world body to end all wars by leading the drive to kill the league of nations in the senate. Just over fifteen years later, the great American icon, Charles Lindbergh shamefully urged Americans to stay out of the fight against Naziism and fascism. Fortunately for us and for the world, FDR had a more enlightened and courageous view of American responsibilities to lead.

And just ten years ago, when I was spokesman for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, she had to launch a public campaign to convince Americans that we should pay our dues to the United Nations because Jesse Helms and Senate Republicans had withheld them for two years running. This quick look back at our history portrays an America whose leaders were primarily concerned with the internal, domestic work of building a nation and who felt physically separate and safe from the world beyond our shores.

I am here to tell you that those days are long gone. The days when Americans could decide when to pay attention to the rest of the world and when to shrink back into ignorance and isolation are over. The world has changed and America now finds itself at a fundamental pivot point in its history. Unlike every generation before us, our great challenges are not longer within but abroad, beyond our shores. Unlike the past, the opportunities and the dangers that will be the most powerful forces affecting the course of our future history will nearly all be external. This will require us to think and live and act differently about the rest of the world.

The fundamental fact that each American must now know is that we live in an age of globalization where borders have shrunk and even disappeared, where technological and scientific change has narrowed distance and time. I think, in this respect, that Tom Friedman's book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, is the most prescient view of our future. Tom writes that the most important forces shaping the planet are all transnational. They represent at once our greatest future opportunity and our greatest danger.

Think of globalization this way?

There is a bright, positive side and there is a dark side. The bright side of globalization is obvious for all of us to see. The incredible power of the information age as personal computers, iPods, and cell phones give people, especially in the developing world, a degree of personal liberty never experienced before in human history. Medical advances that give us the hope of defeating malaria, polio, and many of the insidious diseases that affect especially poor people. Energy research that promises to help replace carbon-based fuels by using hydrogen, biofuels and wind. Space research that may take us in our lifetimes beyond mars.

When we reflect upon the power of science and computers to change our world for the better, then we understand that we live at one of the most hopeful times in human history. We have more power as individuals to create more wealth, conquer poverty and ignorance and improve the human condition than any other generation before us. This is an exceptional moment.

But there is also the dark side of globalization. We are witnessing the rapid development of negative powers that threaten the way we live, and in some parts of the world, our very existence. I think the greatest dangers we face are all transnational. These will likely be dominant foreign policy issues of the next fifty years:

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- Global climate change
 - Trafficking in women and children
 - International drug and criminal cartels
 - The spread of pandemic diseases
 - The proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and technology
 - The chance that global terrorist groups might acquire them and use them against us.

Whether we encounter the positive or negative aspects of globalization, the Atlantic and Pacific can no longer protect us as these forces flow over and under and right through our borders. And because they are by definition global forces, they cannot be combatted by one nation acting alone, however powerful that nation may be, they can only be met effectively by many nations acting together. This very fact gives us an enormous opportunity to do great things internationally. But, it also gives us the responsibility to try to do the right thing and to lead effectively. The U.S. is the most important global leader at a time of globalization. That places a huge premium on our having the best possible leadership in business, academia, and government; people who understand the world. We will need to think internationally more than at any other time in our history.

All nations pursue policies based on their national interest. For the last four hundred years, our predecessors have essentially believed their most important work was here at home to work on project America. We can no longer make that argument. Our most important work is unquestionably now to work on project world. We have some great opportunities to do good things but we are also swimming in a sea of trouble. I have been a professional diplomat for twenty-five years and I cannot remember a time when our country was faced with so many difficult and complex challenges seemingly all at once.

Think of the challenges we face:

- War in Iraq and Afghanistan
- A truculent Iran seeking nuclear weapons and regional dominance
- Genocide and a humanitarian crisis in Darfur
- Massive poverty on all continents
- The human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic in southern Africa
- The rise of a dangerous populism in South America
- The challenges, positive and negative from the extraordinary rise of India and China

The essential challenge before us is to lead the world and to do so persuasively and effectively so that we maximize the positive forces at work in the world today and minimize the dark side. With this in mind, I believe that America must meet five leadership challenges in the years ahead if we are to fulfill our destiny as a truly effective leader.

First, we must accept the mantle of global leadership. We really have no choice as our power is unmatched in the world today. How do we measure that power? Politically, we are the indispensable country called upon to mediate or lead on the most difficult world crises? Kashmir, Taiwan, and Jerusalem. Whether people love us or not, they want us in the middle of the world's hot spots. Economically, we have the largest economy and the most innovative private sector. We are still the

world's technology leader. The world economy can not run without us at the wheel. And militarily, we may just be the strongest country relative to all the others since the roman empire. Think of the huge strategic advantage that gives us, and the huge challenge to use that power responsibly. This unprecedented power demands that we embrace our status as global leader.

Second, we must simply reject the lure of isolationism which has too often been our national reflex at times of great international turmoil. We need to choose instead a policy of permanent engagement in the world. This is now our overriding national interest. If there is one central lesson we must learn from September 11, 2001 it is that we cannot live apart from the world or turn away from its challenges or pull the covers over our heads on stormy mornings.

Third, we need to reject isolationism's evil twin – unilateralism. There are some in our chattering classes who still believe that we are best off in acting essentially alone in the world. They argue that our power is so great and pervasive that we can afford to do so. The unilateralists among us are just plain wrong. Theirs is a one-way road to failure for our foreign policy. A unilateralist country could not in the future take advantage of the most powerful positive forces on the bright side of globalization or have enough troops or money or will to fight the dark forces on its own.

I have a question for the unilateralists. Why is going it alone a good idea?

- It makes no sense to neglect our alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) that can help us shoulder the burden of leadership.
- It makes no sense to want our soldiers to do all the fighting or our taxpayers to foot the entire bill in Iraq or Afghanistan.
- The world's problems will be resolved most easily not by the global cowboy acting alone but by the enlightened sheriff of a united, democratic and global community.

Instead of turning away from the world, as the unilateralists would like us to do, we need to turn back to a stronger and wiser policy of rebuilding the United Nations (U.N.), NATO, the Organization of American States, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the African Union. Fortunately, I think President Bush and the Democratic leadership agree on this fundamental choice of engagement.

Fourth, we need to remain strong if we are to remain a credible global leader. The stark but undeniable reality of the modern world is that groups like al Qaeda and the Taliban are willing to kill large numbers of our fellow citizens. They are ready to fly airplanes filled with innocent people into skyscrapers, to stage spectacular attacks designed to terrorize civilians, just to make a political point. The only way to defeat these groups is to combine enlightened leadership with raw power. We must remain strong to counter them. This calls for continued firm support for a strong American military and diplomatic corps. It calls for asking young Americans to choose national service. We need our very best young people to consider serving our country.

Fifth, the U.S. Must be a positive, inclusive and hopeful world leader. True global leadership requires a concern for all the world's problems. If we communicate that we do not care about what really grips most people around the world, the environment, social justice, or ending poverty, then the rest of the world will not believe in our leadership or follow us. They will think we really do not care about them.

Simply put, the U.S. foreign policy game plan and agenda cannot be just about us, it has to be the world's game plan and agenda to have a chance of garnering full international support. We have to show that we are not the selfish giant so often and unfairly caricatured in the world's newspapers.

Effective leadership demands that those of us who live lives of great wealth and luxury relative to the rest of the world find a way to identify with those less fortunate and build bridges to them. We can not communicate satisfaction with the status quo when nearly 700 million Indians still live at poverty levels, when we see the poor of northeast Brazil and the slums of Haiti. That is why President Bush was so right to speak out about social justice and poverty on his recent tour of Latin America.

Those are the five challenges that I believe we must meet to be a successful global leader. But, there is one final advance we must make and we have to give the world hope. True global leadership demands more than getting the economics and politics right as we leave behind isolation and unilateralism and embrace more strongly our international and multilateral future. If our generation of Americans is to provide global leadership that is convincing to the rest of the world, then we need to speak out forcefully and with sincerity for the most deeply felt human desires to end poverty and injustice and war.

We live, unfortunately, in and all too often, a cynical time. With this in mind, our generation might seek to regain the sense of idealism that is so essential to greatness on the world stage. Americans have been at their best when we managed to articulate what the rest of the world wanted most. We have been at our best when we called for the type of revolutionary and idealistic change most needed in the world. Jefferson did so in writing that all people are equal before god. Lincoln did so in ending slavery. Eleanor Roosevelt did so in committing the new U.N. to a universal declaration of human rights. Martin Luther King did so when he sat in a Birmingham jail and called for revolutionary change through non-violence one hundred years after the Gettysburg address.

America needs to give the world hope again.

Two weeks ago, at a Washington dinner, I heard a very wise retired American politician, Lee Hamilton, say this in a clear and convincing way. He said “great leaders do not just dump problems in people’s laps. They have to provide solutions and the kind of hope that inspires people to do better and to reach for a bigger dream.” I was thinking about what Hamilton said the next morning when my wife, Libby, and I were walking around Washington’s tidal basin to see the famous cherry trees in bloom. We came upon the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) memorial along the route and walked in to read his great words now etched in stone. And it struck me clearly that Saturday morning, when the American people faced the greatest crises since the Civil War, the depression and World War II FDR’s greatest act of leadership was to tell people it was going to be all right. We would prevail if we avoided the one thing that can beat hope if we let it; fear, as he said so famously. He refused to instill fear in people’s souls but rather called them to meet a greater challenge – that of hope. FDR gave the people of America, Europe and Asia the great hope that we would triumph and that goodness would defeat evil.

To be a truly great global leader in the years ahead, we Americans will need to communicate that kind of positive hope to the world. This is a mission worthy of our past and our ideals. It is a mission worthy of a great country. It is a mission that the community here at BC devoted to service ought to be able to embrace. It is a mission that I believe our current leaders are embracing. It is a mission vital to the future of America and, I believe, all who live on this beautiful planet.

In closing, I would like to leave you with some words by president John F. Kennedy, in his June 10, 1963 commencement address at American university in Washington, D.C. He said,

So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our childrens’ future. And we are all mortal.